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Adobo is emblematic of South Florida, combining citrus and ethnic flavors in a healthful way.

Many restaurants are putting out food in much the same manner and in the same settings as they did 20 years ago.

One example is Julia Mae's, hidden among tall pines in the small shrimping town of Carrabelle, on the Gulf Coast south of Tallahassee. Ten years ago, the town of 2,500 gained renown because its one police officer worked exclusively out of a public phone booth.

Purchased from a real-life Julia Mae (now retired) by Tim and Lisa Baroody five years ago, the restaurant maintains the fried-fish and shellfish dinners that have made it a favorite of Tallahassee residents and tourists from Alabama and Georgia since 1975. About 40 pies—including the restaurant's famed coconut-cream pie—are made from scratch each Friday. Everything else is cooked to order.

Upon acquiring the 100-seat restaurant, the Barroodys added grilled items to the menu to cater to patrons who want more healthful selections. The Carrabelle Combo, for instance, offers grilled grouper, scallops and shrimp with a stuffed baked potato for $14.95. "We do sell a lot of grilled grouper and amberjack," says Lisa Barroody, adding that Tim, her husband, regularly goes scuba diving to spear amberjack and other Gulf fish.

Julia Mae's is one of those places found in the far reaches of the state and virtually everywhere in between that often get dubbed "cracker" restaurants. They sell truckloads of blue crab, mullet, shrimp and oysters in season (usually breaded and deep-fried) with sides of Southern-style favorites such as coleslaw, collard greens, fried okra, beans and rice, and the like. And the price is usually right. Being called a cracker restaurant in Florida is not a slam—during tourist season, especially, they tend to fill up first. **R&I**

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Gateway for Flavor

Top-billed Florida chefs have done much to enhance their state's image as a cuisine-viable region, and it is to chefs like Norman Van Aken, Mark Militello and Allen Susser that Floribbean cuisine—characterized by local ingredients melded with the flavors of the Caribbean—owes its due.

But Steven Raichlen has also helped to focus the national spotlight on relative late-comer Florida's contributions to American regional cuisine. The author of *Miami Spice* (Workman Publishing, 1993) and the recently released *The Caribbean Pantry Cookbook* (Workman, 1995), Raichlen is a Miami transplant from Cambridge, Mass. He was among the first to point out Florida's status as gateway for all the new flavors coming out of South America and the Caribbean to meld into America's flavor tapestry.

Raichlen credits three factors characterizing the region's cuisine as a whole. First, there's the unique ethnic makeup of South Florida's Dade County, in which half the population is Hispanic. Second, Raichlen says, is "the fact that we live in a baffling-suit society. We're very appearance-oriented. The style of food that we do here emphasizes health and low fat. There's an emphasis on marinating, grilling, and using fruit salsas and condiments. It's a cuisine that acquires its richness from intense flavoring."

Finally, Raichlen gives a lot of credit to Florida's citrus industry for bringing healthful preparations together with ethnic flavors. "Florida citrus is really emblematic of the cuisine style we have in South Florida," Raichlen says. In fact, he sums up what's happening in one word: *adobo*.

"*Adobo* is the national marinade of Cuba, and combines sour orange or lime juice with garlic, oregano, salt and cumin," Raichlen says. "It's fat-free, and grilling lean meats and seafood that have been marinated in *adobo* bridges all the trends in South Florida right now—ethnic flavors, health and the use of indigenous ingredients."

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